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From Cultural Identity to Political Revindications — the Case of Upper Silesia

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Introduction

The revolutionary changes introduced in 1989, which initiated the massive democratic changes, leading from totalitarian state to democratic one and to open society, disclosed a range of social problems which before had been specifically “frozen” by the totalitarian system. Among such problems there is the manifestation of cultural revindications of those regions of the country, where the consciousness of distinct ethnic features has existed for generations. Upper Silesia is one of those regions, yet its situation appears to be specific as, due to historic reasons and political events from the past (World War II and the first few years after it), any going “back to the roots” appears not to be only just an event of normal cultural revindication, but also a painful memory for specific people who had been involved in those events once. Even if today, after the lapse of so many years, many a memory has been subdued, they come back in reminiscences, as they had constituted the content of the socialization processes, and the younger generations are quite willing to go back to those issues.

The Silesian, native people of the region, estimated to make up some 30% of the population of the Katowice region (voivodship) (here it needs to be noted that the voivodship embraces, although to a slight degree, territories which had nothing in common with Upper Silesia, formerly belonging to Małopolska (Little Poland), and today’s Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, belonging to Russia in the 19th century, when Poland was partitioned), so there is

increasing awareness of living in a minority culture among those people. That separate minority culture of the Silesians often resents the domination of the Polish culture, which is a majority one. This phenomenon, a clear-cut social and cultural one, constitutes the basis for political thinking, for shaping political revindications.

In a democratic society, separate cultural feature, which functions as a lasting element constituting the identity of a large social group, finds some political expression, as it is a function of the public authorities to provide citizens with possibilities of cultivating that culture. Practically, it entails the necessity of finding such a system of authority, which would enable the fulfilment of regional cultural revindications. No wonder then, that with the appearance of cultural revindications in Upper Silesia, came the political ones, among them also the desire to return to the system which that region enjoyed during the inter-war period, namely that of an autonomous region. Of course, nobody is willing to "enter the same river twice" — the political elites of the region are undoubtedly aware of that. The social and political problem that is apparent is thus quite interesting, and the search is on for such a solution which could constitute a permanent element of the political system of Poland. In this sense the "Silesian issue" is also an issue which concerns the whole country.

Upper Silesia as a Specific Research Problem

For several years now, the social specificity of Upper Silesia has been a subject of sociological studies and reflections. It need not be added here that for various reasons (which were mainly due to the totalitarian system, but also, yet to a lesser degree, to the relations between Poland and Germany) the period between the end of World War II and the 1980s (the late 1980s to be exact) saw very limited sociological research regarding the basic elements and issues of distinct cultural features of Upper Silesia. The same applies also to Silesians as having a clearly distinct ethnic features, their sense of belonging to a region, nation, etc. On the other hand, it needs to be reminded that those issues had been raised, as a social problem, in the Polish inter-war reflection (Szramek, 1934). However, references to the studies done before World War II may constitute merely the background for today's analyses, as all the main determinants of the position held by that ethnic group changed, as did all the major conditions for its development within the Polish society (Wódz J., ed., 1990) (mainly due to the war and its consequences for Silesians and their relations to other groups, but also because of the

change in the situation of Upper Silesia in post-war Poland). Today's Upper Silesia is different from the pre-war one, also its relations to the rest of the country have been altered. It proves necessary, still, to refer to history because, anticipating some results of our research, some elements of the self-consciousness of Silesians prove impossible to comprehend without referring to history. This also appears to be an important threshold in comprehending the "Silesian problem" in Poland, where even among professionals (historians, sociologists, anthropologists, etc.) the knowledge about the region is still insufficient, while the today's elites of Silesia are convinced of the existence of an "impassable threshold of ignorance" regarding those issues in Poland, which in turn leads to losing hope that "anyone will ever understand us in Poland". Thus, it proves indispensable to refer to certain important historical facts, which we aim at doing in a nutshell, quoting only those facts which are essential for the clarity of our further arguments.

Let us start by recalling some history, then. The territories considered today to constitute Upper Silesia (anyway, even the very border of the region proves controversial in many aspects, which is, however, of no crucial significance for our reasoning) is often perceived in an oversimplified fashion in Poland (or rather in the Polish social and political thinking) as territories formerly belonging to Prussia during the period when Poland was partitioned. It would be hard to be more incorrect than that. A lot of those territories belonged to Germany (one also has to consider the changes that German state underwent during the 19th century, the war between Austria and Prussia, etc.) and were not considered for the partition (Lis, 1993). A natural consequence of that fact were the specific conditions of development, at those territories, of Polish and Slavonic culture of the people, labelled Silesians. The period of industrialization in the late 19th century resulted in establishment of big urban working-class agglomerations, where Silesians were locked in workers' settlements, living in special blocks of flats (*familoki*), and maintained contacts within space organized that way, mainly among themselves, preserving the specific dialect. Any contact with the "town" (that is the centre of the town) was considered a contact with foreign culture which was the German culture in that case. Hence, on the one hand, the social basis for the continuation of specific features of folk society in urban conditions and industrial culture, on the other hand, the unique role performed by Catholic parishes, as the parish priest was often an organizer of the internal life of Silesian community (Świątkiewicz, 1997). Those facts are of importance, among others, because since the end of the 19th century the social memory of Silesians has coded the impression of developing their own culture in the conditions of confrontation with another dominating culture. The inter-war period was a time of many a perturbation in the relations between Silesia and the rest of Poland. To begin with, let us state that the German minority

in that region was big, mainly bourgeois in character, preserving the elements of German culture, which had dominated there before. It should be remembered that this voivodship (region) was the only one in Poland with a special autonomous status, which made the relations between the inhabitants of Silesia and those elsewhere in Poland somehow "abnormal" (Wanatowicz, 1994). If we add to it the fact that many officials of the inter-war Republic of Poland who held important positions in the voivodship came from other parts of the country (mainly from Wielkopolska and Galicja, who spoke the German language which allowed them to provide administration services for the German minority as well), it will be easier to understand that for many Silesians in their everyday life the relation between their culture (a folk-industrial one, based upon the use of local dialect) and the "official" Polish culture was far from a balanced one, and that using the category of domination could easily explain that. To show that in an even deeper sense, one should mention the role of systems of education, both the German one, which had been in use before the Republic of Poland regained its independence after World War I, and the Polish system in use between the world wars. Both of them were based upon tolerance towards using dialect at lower levels and reduced language competence in "high" German or Polish, demanding, however, that for middle-range careers people should give up their dialect and show superior competence in the proper use of their literary language. This proved to be an extremely important threshold to cross in professional careers and social development of Silesians, so crucial that taking over the high German and later high Polish was in many local Silesian communities an evident proof of abandoning one's sphere, that is giving up the social group of "locals".

Yet another element needs to be mentioned, that of teaching Polish national history and building the basis of Polish national identity upon that. It so happened that the identity had been built upon the romantic trend from the very beginning of the post-World War I Republic of Poland (the November and January uprisings, deportation to Siberia, the functions of Polish romantic poetry and music, the symbolic role of the capital of Warsaw, etc.) which was applicable in no way at all to the collective memory of Silesians. In a certain sense they were taught the "Polish mentality", yet it was built upon everything that was entirely alien to them culturally. That proved to be an important element of being different, as the situation was such that young Silesians were learning as "theirs" the official culture which did not function in their collective memory.

In turn, something very vital for the collective memory of Silesians, their specific attitude to social space (real and symbolic one), never developed in the form of high culture, existed in their collective memory (Wódz J., ed., 1989). That specific attitude to space has been connected with both their life

in the workers' settlements (coal mines, steel works, waste heaps, *familoki* blocks, etc.) and the specific fragmentation of that space according to social functions each part performed. The big workers' settlements in Silesia were organized in such a way that all the important activities vital for living could be performed within the settlement/district while any contact with the centre of the town (marked with the cultural difference) was invariably an event. On the other hand, however, due to the fact that those settlements were connected with the then high technology, contacts with such technology were maintained there on everyday basis. There is a paradoxical saying in Upper Silesia, which may appear to be merely an anecdote, yet which may serve as a good illustration of that relation of the native population to technology: "Silesians knew not what a *kibitka* was (the vehicle to transport the deported individuals to Siberia, one of the symbols of Russian oppression, and a romantic symbol of Polish national identity in the part of partitioned Poland that fell into Russian hands), yet knew where tram No. 5 was going". That is why the Silesian culture does not contain the romantic tradition so specific for the Polish intelligentsia at the end of the 19th century, yet is much attached to local and regional space instead, being at the same time the scene for traditional rural culture and contacts with then modern technology.

There is yet another historic element which needs mentioning in this introduction, namely that from the late 19th century onwards Silesians, as citizens of the German state, had been taught to have respect for the state, which was simultaneously the state of law, efficient administration and very influential public authorities. All that remained in the collective memory of Silesians, no wonder then that their own experiences with the Polish administration in the inter-war period, and particularly that of the post World War II period, provided them with not-too-good impressions. If we accept a wider notion of culture, that which would also embrace the culture of efficient functioning of the public administration, then they must have perceived the culture of Polish administration as "alien" one.

Let us finish the introduction with a few remarks on methodology. We base this report on the framework of methodological assumptions delineated by Janusz Mucha (Mucha, 1997), according to whom minority cultures are referred to a/some dominating culture/s. In our case, using the historical perspective we shall easily prove (what has already been partly mentioned in the introduction), that Silesians have all the reasons to treat cultures to which their culture was a minor one, as dominating (at least by the domination of the education system, legal culture which stemmed from the functioning of the public administration, but also the organization of work, creation of culturally acceptable career patterns, etc.). On the other hand, taking a clearly sociological approach, it appears worthwhile to stop at the level of present experiences, those from the mid 1990s, when the dominating culture is the Polish one,

while the functions of German culture appear only in certain excerpts of collective memory. We develop on that later in the study. It deserves pointing out, though, that a certain scheme, often repeated by the Silesians themselves, that they moved from the domination of one culture to that of another (*toute proportion gardee*) is an expression of a certain vision which the group has about itself, and which cannot be excluded from our analysis. If we follow the methodological indications of Janusz Mucha, mentioned above, we also want the explanation of the relation between the own (minority) culture, and the dominating one to find the expression in the self-consciousness of those whom we studied. In such a perspective, the emotional sphere plays a vital role, hence the short opinion quoted above is a specific illustration of our modification introduced to the general methodology which we mentioned twice before.

Let us now proceed to indicating the research methods and the course of our study. This article is a result of a few research procedures which started in the late 1980s. Most of those procedures were qualitative in character, which is due to the specificity of the phenomenon studied. It is a basic thing for any reliable quantitative procedure to be able to relatively exactly specify the community in which the quantitative procedures of reasoning are then applied and, what is more important, to have the features which describe that community as stable ones (relatively stable). Both those issues prove to be very difficult to define in Silesia, neither the number of Silesians (those who admit to be Silesians at heart) is possible to delineate, nor, what is more important, the features which are decisive for considering oneself (or being considered) a Silesian are stable, as a matter of fact they often undergo substantial changes, as research shows. That phenomenon we labelled the contextual self-definition (described in more detail later in the article), which results in the fact that a given person defines himself or herself in one way in a given situation, and in another one elsewhere. This does not mean, however, that quantitative procedures have been given up altogether, but they have been used in an auxiliary fashion.

Towards the end of 1980s a competition was organized (jointly by the Silesian Scientific Institute in Katowice, and the "Dziennik Zachodni" daily (with the largest circulation in the region)), the topic of which was "Upper Silesia in the Eyes of the Upper Silesians". It was defined that the organizers would be particularly interested in issues connected with the specificity of cultural identity of such people.

62 people responded to the contest, some of their works were quite extensive, thus providing a very interesting material to study. The most thought-provoking works were published (Wódz J., ed., 1990, a). The scientific description of those materials allowed us to define problems identified for the issues studied, as well as to obtain an empirical basis for

the analysis of the issue of relations between the culture of the native people and the German and Polish culture, which analysis has been relatively difficult to carry out in an explicit way. There one could see to what degree these relations between cultures have been intertwined with the contextual identity of Silesians who invariably related to a dominating culture, German or Polish. The next stage of our research was an attempted reconstruction of the content of common consciousness of Silesians (Łęcki et al., 1992). That research was a typically qualitative investigation of the life stories, the contents of those interviews-stories have even been annexed to the book that was published as an outcome of the research. The key issue there was the self-definition of Silesians and the capturing, on the basis of two life stories, of the external elements which were decisive for the Silesian identity. Those problems have been further discussed in the study which clearly related the Silesian culture with "alien" one/s and has been entitled accordingly: *The "Natives" and "Aliens" in Upper Silesia... ("Swoi" i "obcy" na Górnym Śląsku...)* (Wódz K., ed., 1993). Further research contained certain quantitative elements, as two stages of ethnic self-identification studies have been carried out, comprising a total of 340 people. The first of those stages, carried out in 1992, included 240 people, selected using the quota-random method, following the ethnic self-identification criterion; three groups of interviewed people: Poles (120 persons), Germans (60 persons), and those who defined themselves purely as Silesians, without indicating any Polish or German identification (60 persons). The second stage of the research was carried in 1994, and consisted of examining a total of 100 people, selected on the even quota basis: 50 Germans and 50 Poles. The studies done, in spite of all the reservations that may arise, and which mentioned earlier when making comments upon the application of quantitative procedures for research in Upper Silesia, allowed us to consider the problems which we recognized before in the qualitative studies, in a way that allowed to refer to bigger social groups (Wódz K., ed., 1995). A certain generalization of that stage of the research found expression in the book written in English, which attempted to sum up the research procedures applied so far (Wódz K., ed., 1995, a). In 1995, the research team headed by Kazimiera Wódz conducted studies in the towns of the Katowice voivodship (province), concerning the attitude of the inhabitants of that province towards Germans. The research was carried out on the sample of 500 people, selected applying the quota-participation method. It is obvious that although such studies transgress the cultural dimension, yet their results definitely widen the field of our analysis (Wódz K., ed., 1995, b). Finally, the wide research carried out for three years needs to be mentioned, done on the community of miners, who were also divided according to their ethnic self-identification. The research was carried out in seven coal mines, situated in five different towns (Katowice, Mysłowice, Sosnowiec, Czeladź, Siemiano-

wice). The men who took part in the research were selected at random in each mine, whereas the whole sample included equal amounts of persons considering themselves Silesians, Zagłębiacy (inhabitants of the sub-region of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie) and those who moved to the region (who thus did not identify with either Silesia or the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie). Over 450 persons were studied, providing interesting comparative material (Wódz K., ed., 1997), the more fascinating because the significant elements of the native culture tend to be strictly associated with mining, the culture of that profession, and even with the type of family which cultivated and inherited elements of that culture from one generation to the next.

In our analysis we use the research in polithology which indicated the consequences of cultural distinct character of the region (Petaux, Wódz, eds., 1996; Seiler, Wódz J., Wódz K., 1997). The research we mention has been carried out by the International School of Political Sciences in Katowice. We have also applied the generalized results of some earlier empirical studies (Wódz J., 1997, a), as well as earlier generalized analyses which illustrate the origins of the problem (Wódz K., 1994). There is not much empirical research of exclusively polithologic nature, as the problem itself is completely new, not studied thoroughly as yet, hence the widespread use of sociological studies.

The problem of relations between Silesians and inhabitants of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, being a particular one for the issues in question, only partly applicable for the problem of relations between the minority culture and the dominating one (the culture of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie is, obviously, perceived as Polish culture, yet in the very relations between Silesia and Zagłębie, the elements directly connected with the subject matter of conflicts are sometimes more important than the fact that Zagłębie Dąbrowskie culture is perceived as a Polish one), has been discussed in the study edited by K. Łęcki and K. Wódz (Łęcki, Wódz, 1997).

A specific development of our studies and an in-depth approach is constituted by the book published in 1996, which is an accurate rendition of the long interview which J. Wódz conducted with P. Rakocz (Rakocz, Wódz, 1996), a man who may serve as a perfect example of a Silesian who defines himself in life invariable in context, and in relation to both dominating cultures (and social systems): German and Polish. Such research procedures seem to entitle for drawing conclusions about the relation between the local culture and the dominating ones: nothing is defined once and for good, and the very dynamics indicates the relative viewpoint regarding one's own culture, which is always, to a higher or lesser degree, related to the culture of "others".

Family Memory, Local Community, and the Culture of "Others"

Our research indicates that the element which, as for today, is responsible for the impression of living in a minority culture is the certain "burden of the past", amplified by "family memory". We put those two notions in inverted commas, as these are reconstructions of the social consciousness of Silesians, rather than their own self-definitions. We shall provide a quotation from the book referred to earlier (Łęcki et al., 1992, pp. 63—64), where the social world of Silesians is discussed. The quotation is as follows: "Social worlds of those people we studied consisted of the ways of their lives in which they want to find themselves, to define themselves among fellow-Silesians and in a wider social context". It was here, in Upper Silesia that history had its playground and *circenses* in which the unintentional actors were the natives of Upper Silesia. Since the late 19th century, that is the most distant time referred to in the stories about life told about the people we interviewed, a certain dimension appears, which would be alien and unknown to an average Pole from other parts of the country, namely the dependence of one's life not only on one's own past, but also on the past of one's relatives. By relatives mainly parents are meant, but sometimes also grandparents or siblings as well, sometimes other kinsmen, too. The consciousness of being entangled is present in any statement taken for research purposes, although the social and political attitudes differ greatly, and range from active involvement in pro-Polish movements, through involuntary cooperation with the Germans, resulting from a specific historic situation, to explicit declarations of German origin, yet all those stories and statements have one thing in common, the sharing of the fate of natives, whose everyday life is entangled in the burden of the past hanging over their heads. That is the distinctive feature as regards the consciousness of belonging to that region because, as one person expressed that in the interview: "here it was always necessary to co-exist with others, and when wars happened they chased people God knows where and nobody asked their opinions". It is obvious that the burden of the past is particularly imprinted on those who happened to exist actively shortly before the war, during war and Nazi occupation, and the first years following the war, which were filled with fear, misunderstanding, aggression and, what is important, a lasting lack of confidence from others. Yet, this also applies to the younger generation, as such things refer to their parents, sometimes parents-in-law or older brothers or sisters. Thus, the past is not only one's own past but also the family memory.

That lengthy quotation is derived from the recapitulation of the empirical research and provides a good illustration of the problem of living in the

situation of being dominated, also by culture. What is even more important, the research described in the book from which we have just quoted indicates clearly, that for those people then interviewed living with the consciousness of being dominated appears to be, at least in their everyday life, as something "normal" as a part of their "fate". Wilhelm Szewczyk, a renown Silesian writer and expert in the problems and culture of Silesia (Szewczyk, 1990, p. 167), a member of the jury of the competition "Upper Silesia in the Eyes of the Upper Silesians" wrote as follows about the subject: "The participants in the competition, which in principle was one for diaries, were people born already in the 20th century, whose memory could go back to the inter-war period, and which memory was enriched by the family and community memory of tradition. What is symptomatic is the fact that the expression "We, Upper Silesians" sounds pretty arbitrary nowadays. One has the impressions that being shy to utter such an expression is the result of the lesson taught by history, which made Silesians humble towards all the burdens, plagues and calamities they suffered not being guilty. Yet in that humbleness, which is discontinued from time to time for the sake of an angry roar, there is also a particle of joy that so much has been saved of the regional and national identity, which finds expression also in the very personal confessions included in this volume".

There is not much that needs to be added to that. The above quotation confirms the supposition about Silesians, that living in the culture that is dominated and in the world of "natives" who feel they have been and are being dominated, is the peculiar normality for those people.

Dilemmas of the Self-image

We have already mentioned the contextual character of self-definition noted in Silesians. The situations which provoke such self-definition are often those which are somewhat external for the Silesian culture. All the social memory those people have in stock allows them to restrict themselves in the selection of symbols to express themselves in relations with "strangers" in such a way as to create a self-image which will not be a negative one, which will put the other in the situation of being "worse". There is a certain dilemma that the above entails, because in such relations what is required first is the definition of the "stranger" (the "other") in relation to whom the self-image will then be constructed. That is also a specific procedure for the people whose socialization occurred under the circumstances of conviction of having their own culture dominated. This brings about dilemmas regarding the selection

of means of expression and the "range" of truth about oneself that can be disclosed. It seems that in Silesian culture and attitudes there is a tendency to negotiate the content of such relations with "strangers". A good example in this respect may be provided by the long interview with Paweł Rakocz (Rakocz, Wódz, 1996, p. 82), during which the Silesian, a German soldier during the war, renders his visit to Germany in the 1980s, when he went to a German office and introduced himself to the clerk there, hoping to receive some financial compensation for the military service. When the clerk attempted to find out who he was when being conscripted to the army, the Silesian became evasive saying: "I told him openly, that it was so and so, a Silesian, that I could do with some data, some benefit which I am entitled to for being in Wehrmacht. I swore the oath in your army, not in any other". When it occurred that if the administrative procedures are to go any further, he would have to stay in Germany and possibly declare his nationality, he gave up, and decided that some issues should not be touched upon when talking to such a "stranger". Such negotiative way of self-defining is the best proof for having been socialized in a culture which provided people with "being smart" in such a way. No better proof seems to be needed for the peculiar normal life in the minority culture.

On the other hand, in a different research we carried out, we noticed the phenomenon of locking oneself in one's own cultural space in order to avoid certain questions, to avoid the necessity of self-definition. That confining oneself to one's own cultural space was observed particularly during the first years after World War II, while the culture which provoked those fears was the Polish one. When one wanted to avoid the fears, it was better to stay among one's own folk, which made people self-assured, also the world seemed easier to understand from such a position (Wódz K., ed., 1993, pp. 80—81). Hence the category of defining oneself in relation to Polish culture as the dominating one, from which one could find a way out by locking one's own cultural space, by remaining among one's own folk. From the quantitative research (Wódz K., ed., 1995, p. 18) conducted in 1992 one can gather that Silesians define themselves most often in relation to their town and region, while those who considered themselves Poles, in the same research, most often define themselves in relation to such notions as that of state or nation. An argument can be ventured (which would partly result from the "burden of the past", already discussed, which hangs over the cultural self-definition of Silesians) that since the end of the World War II, after which Silesians in general and Silesian culture in particular, have been exposed to specific "polonization" processes (sometimes painful indeed), resulting in a certain stereotype of cultural behaviour that expressed the feeling of being dominated. In a purely anthropological sense of that term, such stereotype not only renders the situation of a person living in a minority culture and feeling

dominated by a majority culture (e.g. by the system of education, the functioning of mass culture, etc.) but also simplifies the understanding of the world. As such, it functions as a specific anthropological prosthesis. The habit of self-defining in such a way that the "I" belonging to the minority culture is related to the "strangers" (Poles in that case who represent the dominating culture in my eyes) is often manifest and serves the purpose of constructing conflicting images of the world even when it would be hard to point out any actual conflict. This is simply a state of social consciousness which, after being fixed and consolidated properly, allows to avoid and subtle analysis of the relations between "my" culture and the dominating one, it is sufficient to define myself as opposed to that dominating culture. This element of cultural self-definition of Silesians has got numerous aspects attached to it, one of them is undoubtedly that used for defining the relations between Poland and Silesia in the category of internal colonization (Dziadul, 1997). We shall later discuss the issue further. It is of importance here to stress that those cultural relations which are apparent merely in the interpersonal relations find various political expressions, and that context is sometimes the one in which the present relations between the Silesian and German culture exist. For the generation which underwent its socialization conscious of two dominating cultures, that is for the people who are now elderly and who were born between the two World Wars, as whereas for their own parents the dominating culture was the German one (before Poland regained independence), and for them in the inter-war period the dominating culture was that of Poland, yet through contacts with the substantial German minority the German culture was also present in the content of socialization processes, thus there were many problems in establishing the self-definition. This does not hold true for the young generation, who do not perceive the German culture as dominating at all, having been replaced in that role entirely by Polish culture, which is mainly due to their own experiences regarding the contacts between culture and language which function in the system of education and in the media, with the culture and language of the own cultural space in which specific elements have been largely preserved, as we have mentioned earlier. Such conflict situations found a favourable ground to be preserved in the very position of Upper Silesia in post-war Poland ("Polish Katanga" as it has been labelled) and in the awareness of Silesians, who perceived themselves as not being understood by Poles. Thus, in the self-image of young Silesians there is only one dominating culture present, which is the Polish one.

The Cultural Pattern of Promotion and Self-realization

The situation of Silesian culture as a conveyor of the basic elements needed for self-definition, as well as that of basic socialization content, may find illustration in cultural patterns of individual careers. In the situation of a minority culture (which, in addition has been aware of being dominated for a few generations already) we deal with including in the socialization patterns also such variants of self-realization which allow a group with minority culture to preserve that culture. Hence the phenomenon of purely folk elements in the industrial culture of Silesians. Career patterns were restricted to those which had been accessible to one's own group, confirming in a way the situation of existing in a minority culture under domination. Traditionally, also the spatial structure of industrial Silesian towns favoured such career patterns, allowing miner or metallurgist settlements to be situated spatially close to mines or steel works and organized in such a way (as *familoki* settlements) that they had a very functional organization of space, related to social aims connected with industrial work, being also clearly spatially isolated from town centres. Those centres "belonged to the majority" (which was practised until the late 1970s), allowing the cultural content of socialization got realized through repeating the career patterns. Here we deal with a particular moment, which needs profound understanding. During the inter-war period, as well after World War II the career patterns widened, allowing for professions and positions higher than those which had been possible within the minority group before. Usually that was done through promoting technical professions and careers. That was explained, naturally, by the very nature of the region and a heavy demand for such specialists. Careers of clerks have been (and still are) assessed poorly, so have been all humanistic professions. Our research indicates that part of the truth is hidden there, which had already been manifest in the inter-war period, namely that humanistic careers required better language competence, which always caused problems. That had been noticed by the Silesian humanistic elites in the inter-war period, which attempted to construct a model of changes in the local culture which would allow for promotion in Polish culture as a higher and dominating one. The work of many institutions served that purpose (including e.g. the Katowice Radiostation or the Silesian Scientific Institute founded by the governor Grażyński), yet careers in the humanities have been and still are valued more poorly by the Silesian people than those in technical professions.

As regards Polish culture as the higher one, an important role has always been played by the state policy. This applies both to the inter-war period (let us remind here that the technical staff for Silesia was to be educated in the important technical university, the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy,

yet it was seated in Cracow!) and, especially, to the post-war period when numerous elementary technical schools affiliated by mines or enterprises constituted the structures for education in Upper Silesia, which was meant for quick professional success (and often also financial one, cf. the high salaries paid then in Silesian industry, particularly in mining), closing or substantially reducing possibilities of further education. In order to graduate from an elementary technical school no improvement of language competence was necessary, it was enough to speak the dialect and understand the high Polish to a degree. At the same time, however, the region developed economically after the war, and became an important administration and political centre. The personnel needed for such development was very often recruited outside the region, which made Silesians even more convinced that their careers were doomed for "self-restrictions". The attempts to promote the region in the 1970s, in the years when Edward Gierek was the first secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party, brought about rather inconsiderate investments which caused lots of problems for today (including ecology) and which resulted in a difficult situation of the region (Dziadul, 1997), instead of changing its traditional situation. The foundation of the university and its activity, especially in the 1970s, did not change much either, it has been only recently that the types of careers pursued by Silesians have changed, which can be seen in the increasing number of students with roots in the Silesian cultural minority.

Polish culture perceived as the higher one has also left its mark, then, in the career pattern and self-realization schemes. Today, when the old settlements for workers disappear slowly (thus putting to an end the spatial conditions for reproduction of Silesian culture), when we witness the vanishing of traditional industrial professions and loss of their importance (mining first of all), also the career patterns and self-realization schemes undergo change, yet the most manifest indication of those changes is not so much the drive to get included in the Polish culture, preserving the local one at the same time (which means acceptance of dual culture in a certain way, with simultaneous reduction of the distance between the two cultures) but rather a series of regional revindications which translate mainly into the language of politics, even regional autonomy is postulated. Such actions do change the relations between Silesian and Polish culture, but at the same time (which is particularly important for the younger generation which is clearly better educated than the generation of their parents) establish new forms of presentation of oneself in a politically conscious manner. It would be enough to mention here the slogans of internal colonization of Silesia, realized by Warsaw, attempts to establish political representations which are entirely regional in character (Seiler, Wódz J., Wódz K., 1997) or attempts to register associations of people of Silesian nationality.

From Minority and Dominated Culture to Political Revindications

With the change of the political system in Poland, in which country since the parliamentary elections of 1989 and the decisive victory of the social and political movement "Solidarity" has been consequently going along the road of constructing democratic institutions and open society, the elements of cultural identity described above began to find expression also in the political form. Political revindications (Wódz K., 1994) which appeared in Upper Silesia showed very clearly (although that fact seems difficult to find its way to the political elites in Warsaw) that the modern identity of Poland must consider the rights of regional minority groups and that the system of modern Polish state must suit the ethnic differentiation of the society (Wódz J., 1997). The situation of Upper Silesia, inhabited by people who very definitely stress their cultural separateness is the best proof of that, yet it is by no means the only region, it is enough to mention here the political revindications based on cultural differences in the regions of Wielkopolska, Kaszuby, Białostocczyzna, etc. A general statement would suffice here, namely that in Upper Silesia democratization processes allowed to move from cultural to political revindications in a simple way.

In the early 1990s, the best proof of that was the creation of the so-called regional ideology in Upper Silesia (Wódz J., Wódz K., 1991; Wódz J., Wódz K., 1993). It is a normal thing (although many a regional leader in Upper Silesia appears to be ashamed of that fact) that moving from cultural revindications to the political ones in a democratic system, where the electorate needs to be motivated to vote for certain regional programmes, has to be done applying certain techniques of creating the future pictures of that society. Such a technique, used by Silesian political and social elites in the early 1990s was the creation of regional ideology. *Grosso modo*, it consisted of certain invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, Ranger, eds., 1983), that is of creating a picture of the region which would consist of only positive features of the "own folk" and only negative ones of the "strangers". Such black and white picture constructed of elements of the past allowed for social mobilization and strengthening of the image of the future which will be good only when we get rid of the "strangers" and "aliens". It was no accident that certain separatist tendencies were revived immediately, as well as the nostalgia for the pre-war political solution, namely the autonomous region within the Polish state. The tendency of creating such ideologies was largely based upon the features of minority culture described above, which culture functioned under domination of a majority culture. As time went by, about the mid 1990s, that regional ideology slowly got less and less attractive, and got replaced with a specific

political practice, which appealed to the new types of local leadership and new types of political representation in Upper Silesia, which are not so common in other parts of the country.

Let us begin with discussing the new types of local leadership (Petaux, Wódz, eds., 1996; Wódz J., 1997, a). The specificity of Upper Silesia lies in the fact that it is a big conurbation, that is a group of a few dozen towns situated so close to each other that the rural areas between them are few and far between, the towns usually constitute a series of successive towns, middle-sized to big ones. There are no metropolies in that conurbation (big cities), it would also be hard to find its centre, although Katowice, being the capital of the voivodship (province) has a particular role because of its administrative function. One can clearly indicate a few equally socially important towns, usually situated far from the centre of the conurbation (Sosnowiec, Katowice, Gliwice, Rybnik). When the situation is like that, local leadership is invariably very important, this is a leadership in a middle-sized or big town, which is always in a very close relationship with other towns of the conurbation. Our empirical research indicates that it was in Upper Silesia that a particular model of local leadership developed, the charismatic one. It is based upon the personality of the mayor or president of town, such a person, however, does not build his/her position upon the party structures but rather upon a social movement or local associations. Usually such leaders are heavily linked with local and regional tradition, enjoy much social confidence, create specific forms of contacts with the inhabitants of the town, outside the party structures, care much in wielding power about referring to local and regional minority culture (Seiler, Wódz J., Wódz K., 1997; Wódz J., 1997, a). In the empirical studies conducted by the International School of Political Sciences in Katowice, we clearly confirmed an example of that type of leadership to exist in the town of Rybnik (Petaux, Wódz, eds., 1996).

Another phenomenon that has been specific for the local politics in Upper Silesia is the establishment of such types of local political representation which differ from those in the rest of the country. Such representation is usually based either on social movements which manifest themselves during local election campaigns in the form of election committees established ad hoc, which directly refer to local traditions and interests, or on the foundation of local or regional political proto-parties. In the Silesian part of the Katowice voivodship (region), that is on the territories considered purely Upper Silesian, the penetration of nationwide political parties is blocked. Nationwide parties have a very poor representation in Silesia, usually they do not have efficient local structures there either, so they do not really count in local election campaigns. Instead, there are a few regional proto-parties in the region (including the main one — the Upper Silesian Union), whose functioning is based on principles

typical for cultural associations. Their activities and the social discourse they develop have a typically cultural character, as they represent the inhabitants of the region who belong to the minority culture, yet during important political events, first of all during local election campaigns, those associations (being proto-parties in fact) change their style and turn their cultural discourse into a purely political one. Those proto-parties either prepare their own lists of candidates running for local offices, or openly support a certain list of the ad hoc founded election committees. Thus, activities in the name of the local people with their minority culture get replaced with political representation. Proto-parties play a crucial political role in establishing that political representation at the local level in Silesian towns.

When discussing typology of political representation one cannot overlook two Silesian initiatives which may differ in character from those described above, yet which are of importance for turning the Silesian identity towards political consciousness. First to be pointed out are the activities of the Movement for Autonomous Silesia (*Ruch Autonomii Śląska*), a proto-party active especially in the southern part of the conurbation which, using the proportional electoral regulations that contained no minimum threshold, managed to introduce its representatives once, in the first elections to the parliament of the 3rd Republic of Poland. The significance of that proto-party diminished recently, yet it represents those people who wanted to implement their political revindications through a comeback to the pre-war autonomy of the region. In the present conditions, the execution of that idea seems quite improbable, hence the passing significance of that Movement. The second issue to be mentioned is the attempted registration of association of people with Silesian nationality. Despite the fact that its leaders do not admit that openly, it is a seemingly separatist initiative. The legal procedures applied by the representative of the state in the region, that is the voivode (governor) prohibited the registration, nevertheless the initiative as such is of importance and indicates, that no reaction from the State authorities to the pressure put on by the indentity-linked revidications in Upper Silesia may also result in establishing movements and organizations which will be extremist in character.

A question may thus be asked regarding the future of that specific region. Going from cultural revindications to political ones is a normal procedure, noted in many other regions. When the national identity changed in such a way as to consider the possibilities of satisfying regional groups (which also feel they exist in a minority culture) in their revindications, it weakens the process of identity quest turning political. If, however, the national identity remains more homogeneous and centralized, this will result in awakening the political consciousness of regional identity and, what is more, extreme forms may also appear. One can state, accordingly, that the key to solving the

"Silesian problem" is mainly in the hands of Warsaw, the residence of the intelligentsia of Polish political elites. In Upper Silesia, on the other hand, such forms of organization of society need to be looked for which could first indicate nationwide solutions here, and then assist any possible modern nationwide solutions (although, so far, Polish political elites are unable to think in a modern way about solving the problem), in order for the people of Silesia to participate, on the grassroots basis, in creating a new modern model of development of the national identity. A proposition in this respect could be the search for a model which would allow self-dependence of regions, while the scope of such self-dependence would be different for each region (the so-called "decentralization with variable geometry"), and would be established through referenda in voivodships (regions), approved by the Polish parliament — *Sejm*.

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